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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#)

SUBJECT: BASSEY UPDATE ON DISENGAGEMENT PREPARATIONS

REF: -

Classified By: Economic Counselor William Weinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This cable was cleared by ConGen Jerusalem

11. (C) Summary: Yonatan Bassey, Director of the Disengagement Authority (SELA), told Economic Counselor on June 14 that although only 300 families have applied for financial compensation, he expects a flood within the next two weeks. He said that 450 mobile homes will be ready in Nitzanim two weeks before disengagement, and that permanent houses will be built in a year. Bassey said that the issue of where to move the graves has not yet been resolved. He also said that SELA has already given 55 agricultural settler families alternate land near Ashkelon in compensation and that 70 SELA psychologists are working in the settlements to ease the transition. Bassey cautioned that the settlers are prepared to take all of the greenhouses out of Gaza within the next few weeks. He acknowledged that Sa Nur will be the most problematic of the four West Bank settlements slated for evacuation because there have been "a lot of arrivals." He maintains, however, that the IDF is well-prepared to carry out the evacuation. End summary.

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Agricultural Assets and Negotiations  
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12. (C) Yonatan Bassey, Director of the Disengagement Authority (SELA), told Economic Counselor on June 14 that the settlers are prepared to take all of the greenhouses out of Gaza, and that it would be a pity because it would take the Palestinians a decade to rebuild and reinvest in the infrastructure there. He said that for him it is easier to destroy the agricultural assets, but it would be better for the Palestinians if they bought them. Bassey noted, however, that up until now he has not seen a "courageous Palestinian leader to say we're here to take responsibility for everything."

13. (C) Bassey told EconCouns that he has given some settler farmers alternate land in Green Line Israel, about 40 dunams per family. Some of the farmers may take their greenhouses and rebuild them on this land. According to Bassey, however, even if these settlers do not stay in agriculture, they may choose to destroy their assets before evacuation day. Bassey commented that the land is near Kibbutz Ziqim south of Ashkelon, and that 1,600 dunams that are going to 55 families are already being farmed. The rest is not arable yet, but 300 dunams are being prepared, he said. Bassey noted that many settlers are hesitating to sign up for the land because they are over 50 years old and "too old to re-start in farming" but they have a week to decide. He explained, however, that SELA would give them the land even after disengagement.

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Compensation Applications  
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14. (C) Bassey said that about 300 families have applied for compensation, and that he expects "a flood" within the next two weeks. He reported that in the last two months, the settlers have understood that he is trying to help them so the settler leaders are not pulling compensation applications out of mailboxes as reported in recent press articles.

15. (C) Bassey could not say how many settlers he has negotiated with on behalf of the GOI because many settler leaders go to him alone and he does not always know how many people they represent. He says sometimes settler leaders have gone to him on their own without the settlers knowing that their leaders are talking to SELA. Bassey commented that many are still in denial, however, and are hoping that this will be like GOI statements of evacuating the settlements in the Golan Heights that never come true. He concluded that the August 15 deadline will put a lot of pressure on the settlers to seek moving solutions.

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Getting Nitzanim Ready  
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16. (C) Bassey reported that the contract to buy the land in

Nitzanim for the settlers, new homes was signed on June 9. He also said that the GOI is preparing the camp where 450 mobile homes will be set up. According to Bassey, developers are working very hard to clear the area and the mobile homes should be ready two weeks before evacuation day in August. (Note: Econoff drove by on June 1 and several bulldozers were working as late as 9:00 P.M. End note.) He contended that the caravans are not "luxury caravans" as the press has reported. He also said Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief of Staff Ilan Cohen had no choice but to promise the caravans because the settlers are not "preparing themselves for the day after." Bassey acknowledged that, although most settlers missed the deadline to sign up for a mobile home, SELA will give them a few more weeks.

17. (C) Bassey noted that the current plan is to build 450 houses within a year, but the GOI can build as many as 700 houses in the area depending on how many settlers sign up. He said the GOI would "build as many houses" as it needs to.

18. (C) Bassey noted that the GOI is not concerned about the court petition from the current residents of Nitzanim against expanding their community for the settlers. He said Nitzanim,s residents have been there for nine or ten years, and that they go to the High Court "every year for something," but they "always get kicked out." Bassey did not foresee that the petition would cause problems in the GOI,s relocation plan for the settlers.

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Negotiations on Graves Pending  
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19. (C) With respect to evacuating settler graves from Gaza, Bassey said that it will be a "big emotional trauma," and he currently has two psychologists secretly working with a settler rabbi on the issue. He explained that many settlers want their loved ones, graves to be moved to the Holon Cemetery to be close to them, but according to Bassey, Holon is full, so negotiations continue. Bassey noted that the IDF Chief Rabbi will perform the transfer ceremony, but suspected this may create a controversy because the Rabbi,s cousin belongs to one of the most difficult settler families in Gaza.

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Under Cover Psychologists  
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10. (C) Bassey also said that SELA has employed a staff of 70 psychologists to help the settlers with other aspects of disengagement. The psychologists are employed by the regional councils, but are secretly financed by SELA. Many settlers go to the psychologists, Bassey said, who would not go if they knew they were being paid by SELA. According to Bassey, they are in schools and working as family counselors. He explained that Avner Shimoni, Regional Council Head of Neve Dekalim, is against disengagement, but he agrees with engaging the psychologists because he "does not want to destroy families."

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SELA,s Budget  
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11. (C) Bassey reported that SELA has only received NIS 50 million with which to operate, and hire accountants and lawyers. For anything else, such as buying the land at Nitzanim, he has to go to the Knesset. All of the funds for compensation, renting apartments, or building new homes are appropriated by the Knesset from the budget, and come from "here and there" within the budget because there is no disengagement line item.

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Northern West Bank Settlements  
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12. (C) Bassey predicted that there will not be any problems with evacuating the settlers from Gannim and Qaddim. They are planning to move to Afula, and the settlement will "be empty by mid-July." According to Bassey, he is currently negotiating with Homesh,s settlers to move to a moshav. He acknowledged that Sa Nur is the biggest problem because the IDF cannot close the settlement since it does not have a surrounding fence. Bassey admitted that recently there have been "a lot of arrivals" to the settlement, but that it should not be difficult to evacuate any assets. He said there are few public services, and no industry or agriculture because most of the settlers work in the north, near Afula, so there is not much to evacuate.

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The IDF is Ready  
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13. (C) Bassey continued that he meets with the IDF every

week, and that he thinks the GOI is very well-prepared. "We are doing a good job" regardless of what the papers say, according to Bassey, and SELA and the IDF coordinate everything together.

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